

ORDER

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

7232.5F

8/13/90

SUBJ: REDUCED OR INCREASED OPERATING HOURS FOR AIRPORT TRAFFIC CONTROL
TOWERS/APPROACH CONTROL FACILITIES

1. PURPOSE. This order establishes criteria and provides guidance for selecting airport traffic control towers/approach control facilities for reduced or increased hours of operation.

2. DISTRIBUTION. This order is distributed to the branch level in the Air Traffic Plans and Requirements Service, Air Traffic Rules and Procedures Service, Office of Air Traffic Program Management, Office of Air Traffic System Effectiveness, Office of Air Traffic System Management, Systems Maintenance Service, Office of Navigation and Landing, Office of Airport Planning and Programming, Office of Airport Safety and Standards, Office of Civil Aviation Security, and Flight Standards Service; to the branch level in the regional Air Traffic, Airway Facilities, Airports, Civil Aviation Security, and Flight Standards Divisions; to the director level at the Aeronautical Center and to the division level in the Engineering, Test, and Evaluation Service, and Engineering, Research, and Development Service at the FAA Technical Center; and a standard distribution to all air traffic, airway facilities, airports, civil aviation security, and flight standards field offices and facilities.

3. CANCELLATION. Order 7232.5E, Reduced Hours of Operation for Airport Traffic Control Towers/Approach Control Facilities, dated July 12, 1979, is canceled.

4. BACKGROUND.

a. To enhance the agency's management of limited staffing resources, facility and regional management must carefully assess the costs and benefits of sustaining facility operations during periods of low volume air traffic operations. Staffing savings may be achieved by reducing the operating hours of facilities that do not have sufficient air traffic activity during late evening and early morning hours to warrant air traffic control services during these periods. More importantly, available resources may be realigned for more effective use during other periods or at other locations to support higher density operations. In some facilities, operating hours may be reduced with little or no inconvenience to users and no adverse impact on safety of operations.

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Initiated By: ATM-100

b. Additionally, facility and regional management must carefully assess and review facility operations on a continuous basis to ensure that changing operational requirements and user needs are being met. An assessment of the costs and benefits of increasing facility operations to meet changing requirements and user demand is necessary to ensure that agency resources are aligned and used efficiently and effectively.

c. Prior to selecting a facility for reduced or increased hours, regional air traffic divisions must ensure that requirements in paragraph 7 are completed and a staff study is prepared as prescribed in paragraph 8.

5. EXPLANATION OF CHANGES. This order revises the approval procedures to reflect implementation of the straightline organization in Air Traffic, to add criteria and guidance for increasing a facility's hours of operation, and to add additional areas to consider when selecting facilities for reduced or increased hours of operation.

6. CRITERIA.

a. Reduction in Hours of Operation. A facility is a candidate for reduced operating hours when its average hourly operations are four or less over a representative 90-day period. If the facility is operating 24 hours daily and a reduction is proposed, the average of four or less operations per hour should be for 5 or more consecutive hours over the 90-day representative period. Consider towers and approach control facilities individually. The existence of radar does not limit consideration. The hours of radar service need not correspond with the hours of tower service.

b. Increase in Hours of Operation. A facility is a candidate for increased operating hours when the traffic at the airport during the time the facility is closed averages more than four operations per hour over a representative 90-day period or special operational/user requirements warrant increasing the operating hours. Operating hours can be increased in any increment (a half hour or one or more hours). Consider towers and approach control facilities individually. The existence of radar does not limit consideration. The hours of radar service need not correspond with the hours of tower service.

c. Service Hours. Occasionally, early opening or late closing of the facility may be necessary and will be handled in accordance with the guidance contained in Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration.

7. REQUIREMENTS.

a. Traffic Survey. Conduct a survey of hourly traffic operations for at least a representative 90-day period in each facility with low density traffic periods or with apparent increases in operations during the hours the facility is closed. Compute the hourly average. If the hourly average meets the criteria in paragraph 6 for reduced or increased operating hours, proceed with other actions to determine whether the operating hours should be reduced, increased, or retained. If the hourly average does not meet the criteria for a change in hours during the initial survey, make annual spot checks to determine if operations have changed sufficiently to warrant further survey and consideration.

b. Operational Considerations. In selecting facilities for reduced hours of operation, consider the following:

(1) Type of Operations. Determine the impact of the proposed change in operating hours on the types of operations to be conducted. Consider the type of aircraft operating during that period, general aviation activities, and any proposed or projected changes in scheduled commercial or cargo service provided at the airport.

(2) Weather Observations. Provide for weather observations, including Runway Visibility Value (RVV) and Runway Visual Range (RVR) where required, and an altimeter setting source.

(3) Airport Emergencies. Provide for notification of emergency units where such notification has been the responsibility of the tower. This should be included in a Letter of Agreement.

(4) Military Operations. Provide for support of contingencies, exercises, readiness inspections, periodic night flying, special military operations, etc.

(5) Provisions for Continued IFR Air Traffic Control Services. Designate the facility that will provide service and determine radar/radio coverage available, communications interface requirements, etc.

(6) Control Zone. Determine impact on control zone and alternative provisions to meet criteria and provide control services. See criteria contained in Order 7400.2B, Procedures for Handling Airspace Matters.

(7) Airport Lighting. See Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration, Chapter 12, Section 5, Airport Lighting.

(8) Approach Minimums.

(a) Coordinate with regional Flight Standards and Airway Facilities representatives, users, airport owner/operator, etc., when minimums will be affected.

(b) Determine impact of provisions made for airport lighting controls and altimeter source. An unmanned tower, in itself, will not require raising instrument approach minimums. However, the intensity setting of an approach light system or the use of an alternate altimeter source during the period a tower is unmanned may require an increase in approach minimums. Where minimums will be affected, action must be taken by the appropriate Flight Standards office to publicize the increased minimums (NOTAM, reissue the published Instrument Approach Procedure Chart, etc.) before lower airport lighting settings may be used.

(c) Determine navigational aids monitoring arrangement. The absence of personnel monitoring the status of a navigational facility that is equipped with an automatic shutdown feature does not require raising minimums. However, the absence of personnel will result in the loss of alternate minimums where alternate minimums are authorized.

(d) Adjust straight-in approach minimums at locations where straight-in approaches to more than one runway are authorized and simultaneous runway lighting capability does not exist. Straight-in approach capability may be withdrawn at night for unlighted runways.

(9) Servicing Security Element. Provide for changes that may be required in the physical security configuration and planning for the tower and associated NAVAIDS.

c. Personnel. Determine the impact on employment levels. If reduced hours result in excess staffing, develop a plan for placement of personnel which permits maximum continuity of employment with minimum dislocation and individual hardship. Coordinate with the regional Human Resource Management Division for appropriate actions. If increased operating hours cannot be accomplished within existing budgetary and staffing resources, initiate appropriate budgetary requests.

d. Preliminary Coordination.

(1) Determine the impact a reduction or increase in operating hours would have on the local community by early informal coordination with airport users, community leaders, and airport managers.

(2) Coordinate planning with adjacent air traffic facilities, Airports Division, Airway Facilities, Flight Standards, adjacent PAA regions, Flight Service Stations (FSS/APSS/IAPSS), and other Government service agencies, as appropriate.

(3) At facility and regional levels, coordinate with representatives of the appropriate military departments to facilitate operational level military planning and to determine impact on military operations. Washington headquarters will coordinate with appropriate military service headquarters for formal concurrence when military operations are affected.

(4) At facility and regional levels, coordinate with representatives of the servicing security element to determine the impact that an increase or decrease in operating hours would have on physical security risk and vulnerability factors pertaining to the tower and its environment.

e. Assessment.

(1) Reduction in Hours

(a) Assess the degree of restriction or inconvenience imposed on the aviation community.

(b) Determine if the annual savings in staffing and facility operation or other benefits resulting from the reduced hours of operation exceed the annual cost of the actions (equipment changes, communications interface, etc.) required to provide services to users.

(2) Increase in Hours.

(a) Assess the degree of improvement or convenience that will be provided to the aviation community.

(b) Determine if the increased annual costs in staffing and facility operation resulting from the increased hours of operation can be accomplished within regional resources and if the benefits of increased service provided to the users is cost effective and/or meets operational requirements/commitments.

8. STAFF STUDY. Prepare a detailed staff study addressing all factors necessary for effective evaluation, analysis, and decision to reduce/retain the facility operating hours or to increase operating hours where additional funding and staffing are required to accomplish the requested action. See Order 1800.7B, Staff Studies, for format and content. As a minimum, the staff study should contain:

a. A concise statement of the issue.

b. General information (include as background in the body of the study or as enclosure):

(1) A brief description of the air traffic control facility and services provided.

(2) User operations during the hours in question (scheduled air carriers, air taxi/commuters, scheduled cargo flights, medical flights, military operations, etc.) and type of aircraft involved.

(3) Annual traffic operations (instrument and total; airport operations should be shown by category).

(4) Airport facilities (runways, navigational aids, etc.).

(5) Other air traffic facilities serving the airport (center, flight service station, etc.).

(6) Results of the 90-day traffic survey.

(7) Other background information as applicable (projected traffic increases/decreases, etc., as appropriate).

c. Discussion, results, and arrangements made in consideration of each of the items addressed under REQUIREMENTS, paragraph 7.

d. Cost estimates (Ops and F&E) for equipment requirements, staffing requirements or savings, etc.

e. A concise statement of the recommended course, or courses, of action.

9. APPROVAL AUTHORITY.

a. A reduction of 4 hours or more, or a change in operating hours that results in a decrease in personnel, is a significant change requiring the Administrator's approval and notification to the Secretary of Transportation, as prescribed in Order 1100.1A, FAA Organization - Policies and Standards. To fulfill this requirement, send a copy of the staff study as an enclosure to a cover letter from the Air Traffic Division Manager to the Executive Director for System Operations through the Associate Administrator for Air Traffic. Summarize the proposal in the cover letter. Allow at least 90 days before proposed effective date for headquarters internal and interagency coordination and approval, mail delivery, advance public announcement, etc.

b. Air Traffic Division Managers are authorized to increase operating hours or make minor reductions (less than 4 hours) within budgetary and staffing limitations. These actions are not considered to be a significant change as prescribed in Order 1100.1A, thus the Administrator's approval and notification of the Secretary are not required. Seasonal changes in operating hours may also be made without advance notice and approval as these are also not considered significant changes.

c. An increase in hours of operation that cannot be accomplished within existing budgetary and staffing limitations will require funding/staffing allocation and approval of the Associate Administrator for Air Traffic. To fulfill this requirement, send a staff study addressing all items, except in paragraph 8, item c, as an enclosure to a cover letter from the Air Traffic Division Manager to the Associate Administrator for Air Traffic through the Director of Air Traffic System Management. Summarize the proposal in the cover letter. Allow at least 90 days before proposed effective date for Washington headquarters internal coordination and approval, mail delivery, advance public announcement, etc.

10. IMPLEMENTATION.

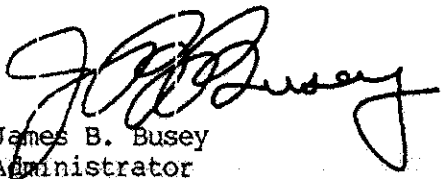
a. If the proposed reduction in hours of operation requires the Administrator's approval, the Administrator's letter of approval will contain the date of notification to the Secretary. Wait 10 or more work days after the date of notification to the Secretary before publicly announcing and proceeding with the approved reduction of operating hours.

b. If the proposed reduction or increase in hours of operation does not require Washington headquarters approval, no waiting period is required before publicly announcing and proceeding with the reduction or increase in operating hours.

c. If the proposed increase in hours of operation requires only funding/staffing approval, there is no waiting period once approval is received before publicly announcing and proceeding with the increase in operating hours.

d. Air Traffic Division Managers notify their respective Regional Administrators regarding proposed increase/decrease in hours of operation and should establish specific procedures consistent with Order 1100.1A and Order 1100.155, Implementation of Straightline Organization for Air Traffic, for implementing and publishing notices of approved reductions or increases of operating hours. Provisions should be included for notifying local and federal officials (Members of Congress, military units, airport authorities, etc.). The reduction or increase should be publicly announced at least 15 days before the effective date. Emphasis on the minimal impact of the action and on remaining services may help preclude misunderstanding by the general public.

e. The regional Air Traffic Division Manager shall notify the Associate Administrator for Air Traffic, AAT-1, Attention: ATM-1, whenever the approved target date is changed by more than 10 days.


James B. Busey
Administrator

